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SUBJECT: Public Outreach in South and East Kalimantan

Ref: A) Jakarta 837; B) Jakarta 847

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Embassy Officers conducted two public outreach events in Kalimantan during an April 22-24 reporting trip (see reftels). In Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, Embassy Officers delivered a presentation and presented PAS materials on the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election. In Tarakan, East Kalimantan, Embassy Officers met with prominent business leaders and the Rotary Club of Tarakan for discussions which focused primarily on U.S. - Indonesian relations, including both countries' current economic situations. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Embassy Officers gave a presentation on the 2008 U.S. Presidential election and the U.S. election process at Lambung Mangkurat University in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, on April 23. The 40 faculty and students posed a variety of questions to the Officers, many focusing on whether a new U.S. President would be capable of implementing "a fair approach to the Israeli issue and towards Islam" and how the "invasion of Iraq" could be considered consistent with democracy. Students expressed surprise that the U.S., which they called the role model for a perfect democracy, was still undergoing change and improvement and asked detailed questions about the Electoral College. Officers explained that democracy is a constantly evolving process that includes ongoing debates among the population and lawmakers on foreign policy.

¶3. (U) In Tarakan City, East Kalimantan, Embassy Officers met with local Jawa Post newspaper Radar Tarakan's Manager Anny Susilowati and journalists, and a group of 10 Rotarians and business leaders, including a professor from Tarakan City's Borneo University, and a leader of the Red Cross in Tarakan. The conversation focused on economic issues and questions about the U.S.-Indonesian bilateral relationship.

¶4. (U) The Rotarians held a positive attitude towards the local government, citing progress especially in the area of health, education, and income improvement. The Tarakan Red Cross representative noted that the maternal death rate in Tarakan was 72 per 100,000 births, while nationally it was 307 per 100,000. General Manager of Bumiputera Bank Tarakan, Deny Wirawan, said that his bank had Rp 3 trillion in savings and Rp 800 million in credit. Tarakan Rotarians reflected national concerns about economic conditions, but did not sound any alarms on local economic conditions.

¶5. (U) The interlocutors highlighted the close relationship the region has with Malaysia. This relationship is especially close when compared to the relationship with the southern part of East

Kalimantan, supporting the rationale behind the local effort to create a new province of North Kalimantan (Ref B). They noted that food prices in Tarakan were double that in East Kalimantan's capital Balikpapan due to high transportation costs. Consequently, many people in the region preferred to cross into Malaysia to purchase basic food stuffs. Another Rotarian mentioned that increasingly people in the area are choosing to send their children to school in Malaysia, including his family.

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